

INDIRECT THREAT TO FBI INVESTIGATOR

Spy Net Seen Shielding Chilean's Killers

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WASHINGTON—Against the background of a busy airline terminal, the scene was played out in a matter of seconds. A young woman who had just landed at John F. Kennedy airport in New York was approached by a stranger.

"Tell your boyfriend to stay away from the Letelier case or somebody will get hurt," the man said, then melted into the crowd.

The woman was the fiancée of an FBI agent assigned to investigate the murder of Orlando Letelier, a cabinet minister in the deposed government of Marxist President Salvador Allende of Chile. Letelier was killed Sept. 21 when a bomb exploded in his automobile on Washington's "Embassy Row."

The threat told the FBI a great deal about the killers they were seeking:

Letelier was murdered by members of a group sophisticated enough to find out the name of an FBI agent assigned to the case, to place him under surveillance, to determine the identity of his fiancée, to learn her travel plans and to pick her out of a crowd. In short, an organization with an effective intelligence apparatus.

That doesn't prove who killed Letelier, of course. But it could rule out most nonpolitical motives. The killer apparently was not an individual with a personal grudge.

The FBI has assigned agents to work full-time on the case in Washington, New York, Miami and perhaps other cities, according to sources familiar with the investigation.

"This is a big case, like a big kidnapping," one source said. "There are a lot of people working on it."

The CIA also is understood to be participating in the investigation.

Two possible theories—both still unproved—have emerged. One is that Letelier was killed by agents of the present government of Chile. The other is that he was murdered by right-wing Cuban terrorists.

So far, there have been no arrests.

Although the FBI has been reluctant to discuss the case, it is understood that U.S. officials were shaken by the murder, which seemed to have been planned as a deliberate insult to the United States.

The 44-year-old former diplomat was killed when a charge of C-4 plastic explosive detonated under the floorboards of his auto. Also killed was a U.S. citizen, Ronnie K. Moffitt, 25, a colleague of Letelier's at the Institute for Policy Studies, a left-leaning Washington "think tank." Mrs. Moffitt's husband, Michael, was also in the car but was not seriously hurt.

Letelier was driving along Massachusetts Ave. near the most important embassies in the capital when the bomb exploded.

If the killers had wanted to settle a score with Letelier without embarrassing the United States, so the theory goes, they could have used a means which would not have endangered two Americans and they could have picked a less sensitive location.

Letelier served as foreign minister and defense minister in the Allende government. He also was ambassador to Washington. Before his death, Letelier was an enemy of the military junta of President Augusto Pinochet which overthrew Allende's elected government on Sept. 11, 1973.

Letelier was arrested by the junta the day the Allende government was overthrown. In an interview with Playboy magazine made public after his death, Letelier said that he was taken from his cell by a firing squad but for some reason was spared at the last minute. After spending one year in a Chilean prison, he was permitted to leave the country. He had been a member of the staff of the Institute

for Policy Studies since he was released from prison.

Only 11 days before Letelier was killed, the Pinochet government published an official decree revoking the Chilean citizenship of the former cabinet minister for allegedly conducting "a publicity campaign to obtain political and cultural isolation of Chile."

The decree specifically blamed Letelier for persuading the government of the Netherlands to withdraw a \$63 million development credit Chile had been seeking.

The controlled press in Chile also was sharply critical of Letelier before his assassination. But the Pinochet government denied that it was implicated in the killing, which it called an "atrocious act of terrorism."

The day after Letelier was killed, two Santiago newspapers suggested in editorials that the assassination would be used to rekindle an international campaign of hatred against Chile.

U.S. officials discourage speculation that the Pinochet government played a part in the murder. The Washington Post quoted informed sources earlier this month as saying that CIA Director George Bush believes it would have been counterproductive for the junta to have committed such a crime.

Letelier's colleagues at the institute said that less than two weeks before he died, he told them he had received a letter from a source in Chile reporting that the junta had debated whether or not he should be killed.

According to the letter, Letelier said, a moderate faction opposed to his assassination won the debate over those who contended that he should be eliminated.

One associate said Letelier carried the letter with him at all times to protect the name of the person who wrote it. This associate said the letter was not with Letelier's effects after the bombing. It could have been destroyed in the blast or it could have been impounded as possible evidence by police or the FBI.

The FBI is understood to be actively investigating the possibility that right-wing Cuban exiles may have been involved. In recent years, exile groups—including veterans of the Bay of Pigs invasion and of the CIA-backed effort to assassinate Cuban

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